



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### **About...Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)**

##### **What is CWD?**

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a disease of the nervous system of deer and elk. The disease is similar to a group of diseases referred to as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE). This group of diseases includes scrapie of sheep, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (Mad Cow Disease) and new variant Creutzfeldt - Jakob disease (CJD) of humans. The agents that cause these infections are called prions, an abnormal form of a natural protein of the nervous system.

The disease was first found in 1967 at a Colorado wildlife research facility. It has now been found in wild deer and elk in Colorado and Wyoming and in wild deer in Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin, New Mexico, and Saskatchewan, Canada. It has also been found on elk farms in several states.

##### **How is CWD spread?**

The spread of CWD is not well understood, but animal-to-animal contact is a likely route. It may be spread from doe (adult) to fawn (baby). It may be spread in the environment, through soil and water.

##### **Who is at risk for CWD?**

There is no evidence that this disease has been spread to people. There have been reports of suspected human cases; however, investigation of those cases revealed other nervous system diseases, not CWD.

##### **What are the symptoms of CWD in deer and elk?**

CWD is a disease of the brain. Animals with CWD will display abnormal behavior, loss weight, and die. Signs include being listless, lowering of the head, blank facial look, teeth grinding, loss of appetite, drooping ears, and walking in set patterns.

CWD is a slow, progressive disease and is usually not seen until the animal is 18 months old or older.

### **How is CWD treated?**

Once an animal has CWD it cannot be treated.

### **How is CWD prevented?**

The risk of humans catching CWD is considered low; any animal showing signs of illness should not be eaten. To reduce the risk, brain, eyeballs, spinal cord, spleen, or lymph nodes from any deer or elk should not be eaten. See links below for more information on safely dressing and preparing deer meat.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/2886.htm> or <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/cwd/>

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